The Man in the Window

Everyday I look out the same window and see the same thing. A thin, dark tree in the center of my backyard. Sometimes in spring it grows overpoweringly bright with yellow leaves. The ground underneath the shade of the leaves is pure dirt, causing a harsh contrast to the rest of my lawn. But ever since I moved in, I swear it's gotten closer and closer. Like when I'm not watching it, it slides closer and closer to the window.

There's this old chair in my home, positioned perfectly so I can see the tree just at the right angle and sometimes, and I know this sounds crazy but please listen… Sometimes… Sometimes I swear a man stands where the tree is. But the second I look at it head on, it's just the tree… Now, if most people were in a situation like this, they would just have someone over with them all the time, right? Wrong. Whenever I have my sister over, it's on its best behavior. I've even had her try sitting in the chair most of this activity occurs in, but she can't see anything abnormal. It makes me feel insane sometimes. I've tried talking to a psychiatrist but he's no help. Just stuffs me full of pills to keep me sedated. Quite frankly all I'm paying for now is just a pharmacist with a therapy license.

Nights are particularly awful. Even though I don't sleep by the window or even by the backyard, the trees by my bedroom seem to close in on me. When I try and fall asleep, they clack against the glass of my window, making the hair on the back of my neck come to attention.

The shame is before moving here I felt fine. Trees never felt like a threat, just a natural part of the world. My life was going wonderfully until I bought this house from my late grandmother. Her one warning was to not disturb the peace of the nature around it. I guess I somehow did.

In her old photo albums, there were photos of the house in the early days. The tree was there. Even with the old grain tinting the photo from age, it's clear something has changed. The bark looked lighter, like a sandy brown compared to the current dark chocolate that covers it. The leaves were also a darker yellow, almost orange color. Now, the bark is so dark it's almost turned black. The leaves have also aged to a more neon yellow. When the light hits it just right, it's nearly blinding. Perhaps it's just grown crotchety in its later years. Maybe it even misses my grandmother and her care… Wait… Why was I looking at her old record again…? Was I… Maybe there's some gardening tips in here… A way to appease it…

Around midnight, I carefully slid out back and filled up my watering can, heading over to the tree. With gentle steps, I approached the tree and slowly began to water it. The water cascaded down the bright leaves, and if I wasn't entirely sure I was in some sort of wrong state of mind, I could've sworn it glowed lightly, as if pleased by me paying attention to it. I smiled, setting the can down after giving it a thorough watering.

The following morning, the tree was pushed against the window.

In my shock at the new location of the tree, I failed to realize someone was knocking on my door. When my shock waned, I quickly sprung up to answer it. By the time I arrived to greet them, no one was there except a small parcel. With careful hands, I lifted it into my grasp and backed into my home. With steady steps I moved to my center table, right beside the chair and set the parcel down. When I looked to my side at the window, the tree had returned to its prior spot, perhaps even a foot or two back. Was it possible the tree was scared of whatever the package contained? No, what a silly thought. I'll open this tonight before I water the tree again. For now I'll go shopping. Perhaps catch a film… What was that one I wanted to see? I can't seem to remember… Oh well. I'm sure it'll hit me when I arrive…

For the remainder of my day, I meandered around town, not yet feeling able to return home. Instead of seeing the movie, I decided to invite my sister over for dinner. I'd stopped by the store to grab some groceries for the meal before picking her up and taking her home. On the way we discussed our separate days and how life was in general. Her life, as per usual, was going just as well as it had since we were young. She'd gotten a promotion in her field of work and was going to move in with her boyfriend. Her health, mental and physical, was in its best shape, and she found a beautiful new home a few states away. She'd be moving far away soon. Shame. Feels like I was just beginning to know her.

Upon our arrival home, I took the things to my small kitchen while she sat in the chair and looked at the package, turning it around in her hands. She commented quietly on the heaviness of the box, how it even seemed to have its own gravitational pull. I laughed softly, washing the potatoes I'd just bought for the meal. When I looked up, I saw clearly the man in the window. He'd never been so forward, especially not with company. I recognized him almost instantly, my jaw dropping in shock. Standing there, in the dark backyard under the porch light, was Johnny, a man whom I'd known. We used to have coffee together but one day he stopped showing up. I was deeply saddened by his disappearance but eventually moved on. Only about a week later did I move into my grandmother's house and the tree issue began.

My hands fell limp as I stared at him. In the chair, my sister had begun to open the box. When she did, she screamed in terror and jumped out of her seat. The old chair tipped back and the box fell to the ground, a strike of lighting flashing outside. When I looked at the incident, I saw Johnny's head roll from the box. Turning my gaze back to the window, I saw his headless figure standing where the tree was the first day.

Before I could attempt to explain anything to my sister, she scampered out, muttering something about calling the police and never contacting me again. I tried to follow after her, but she slammed the door in my face and tore off before I had the chance. In my anger at this, I turned to the backyard, picking up Johnny's head as I stomped. If I'd really taken a moment to let myself settle, I would've realized there was no head, instead a few twiggy branches and a note. Going outside, I dropped his head and reached for my ax, approaching Johnny. When I got there, I gave him copious whacks, watching as the tree bled and horrible distorted cries rang into the night. In my fury, I slipped, watching the ax as it flew into the air before diving back down and into the center of my chest, my vision cutting…

When the police arrived the following morning, they found two corpses, a bloody tree and a dead woman with an ax in her chest. Must've slipped in the rain, one commented as they bagged her up and carried her away.

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